

*Frank Stephens
Field Notes, 1924*

January 16 - May 28, 1924

SAN DIEGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

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Jan'y 16 1924

Left home at 7-40 yesterday morning, driving the Ford truck, with Mr. P. H. Parker, Mrs. Parker overlook us east of Pine Valley and Mr. P. got in her Ford touring car. After lunch I went on ahead, driving to Dixie at dusk. As they did not overtake me I inquired of a passing auto if they had seen them. They said they saw a Ford a few miles back, apparently doing some repairing. I drove back and found them. They had a "blow out" and the car was working badly otherwise.

This morning I towed them to Dixie, by which time they had gotten the car to go. They went to Seely and repaired the electrical wiring, while I staid on the west side of the river.

Yesterday I saw but two ground squirrels by the roadside, tho it was a fairly warm day.

Probably the ground squirrels become semi-dormant in winter and do not come out very often.

There is a good sized flock of blackbirds in a patch of narrow-leaved tules in an old channel half a mile or less west of the main channel. They are wild and stay out in the thick tules where one can't see them. Saw a ♂ Phainopepla, wounded him but he got away in the arrow weeds. Saw two phainopeplas(?) greatcatchers, two Say's flycatchers and several intermediate sparrows in the rabbit brush, and a mocking bird.

Jan'y 17th 1924

Mr. Parker couldn't get his car started this morning so I towed them to the garage in Seely. I heard such bad reports of the old road to Carrizo Creek that I decided not to attempt to travel it. I walked out a little way from the fork and evidently no car or wagon had been over it for many months. We drove to Fowlers well in the north end of Coyote Mt. and made camp there.

Jan'y 18, hunted fossils in the morning, with rather poor success, but found an old blind road leading toward the Carrizo Creek road. In the afternoon we drove down to it, coming out beyond the sandy part of the road. There was some travel here, probably it turns off on a branch leading toward Brawley. Put out 30 traps for mice.

Coyote Mountain is a great mix-up of many kinds of rock. Around camp is a conglomerate of volcanic material, lava, volcanic ash and metamorphic rocks, reddish, purplish or dark gray in color. Over this is many feet of cemented gravel and coarse sandstone. Farther up the canon are other kinds of rock, including fine light gray and bluish marble, also grayish and yellowish limestone.

Outside the main mountain is a zone of low hills carrying fossils in places. Usually the hills are capped with a stratum of ground up shells cemented together. The fragments are so badly water worn and broken that it is scarcely possible to find identifiable specimens, but they are very evidently shallow water species, "rock oysters", pelecypods, etc, and with very little gravel or sand mixed with the shell fragments. There are millions of tons of this stratum incircling Coyote Mt. In the south, east and north. Underneath this are other strata carrying a few other species, tho I did not find any today. I found one place where there were fragments of large oysters but they were solidly cemented in the rock and were all badly broken up. There are places here where large oysters in fair condition lie on the surface weathered out.

Jan'y 19 1924

Had but one mouse (*Peromyscus eremicus*) in my traps this morning. Went to the divide between two of the higher peaks of Coyote Mountain. Found some fossil shells, but mostly broken and firm in hard limestone.

Jan'y 20 1924

Drove to Carrizo Creek. The road follows up the creek bed about two miles and is hard most of the way, but there is occasionally a soft sand patch. One of these took me half an hour to get thru.

Set out some gopher traps, in salt grass along the creek, where gophers are rather common. Looked for wood rats in the mesquit bunches but saw no certain signs. No one is living here now. There are some cattle around the water. Heard a coyote a few minutes ago.

Jan'y 21 1924

A coyote carried off one of my wooden set traps. I set it for ~~Desert Pocket Rats~~ and probably caught one. I hunted around for some distance but could not find the traps. Coyotes seem to carry traps quite a distance before stopping to eat the animal caught.

I see a few rabbit tracks, cottontails. Half a dozen Robins were here this morning. Intermediate Sparrows are rather plentiful. Saw several *Phainopepla*, one Titlark, several Killdeer and three Jacksnipe in a marshy place also a Raven.

Jan'y 22 1924,

Saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a flock of Blue birds this morning. One of the female Gophers skinned this forenoon contained three large potatoes. Saw one Black Phoebe.

Jan'y 23 1924

Took a long walk north of camp today looking for vertebrate fossils but failed to find traces of any. It is a very rough region; a series of ~~deep~~ deep gulches with the tops of the intervening ridges on nearly the same general level. To hunt the region over thoroughly would take months. I was thru this part of the basin several years ago, and came across a little stream of salt water. Mr. Bailey (Theo) told me that when surveying here twenty years ago he camped at or near the little salt stream and found one place where the water could be used. He said he found some fossil bones not far from his camp and brought two to camp. When leaving there they had the pack animals too heavily loaded to bring the bones too, I felt sure I could find his camp, but failed. From present appearances I believe the floods have buried the little stream so deep with sand and clay that no water appears on the surface. I found pieces of fossil wood in two places. Over toward the northeast edge of the basin I found fossil shells, of the same species as are to be found at the base of Coyote Mt. This basin is about ten miles across, nearly circular. The altitude at the outlet is four or five hundred feet, that of the western edge about a thousand feet. The western side is bordered ~~by~~ by the foothills of the Laguna Laguna Mts. - the southern side by a ridge that culminates at the eastern end in Coyote Mt. - the northeastern side is cut off from the Colorado Desert by the Fish Creek Mts. - the north by Split Mt. - and the north west by Piñon Mt. Valharto Creek comes in from the north west, and Carrizo Creek from the S. W.

Leavitz Creek. Jan'y 24 1924

A female *Phainopepla* skinned today had several ova as large as No. 10 shot.

25 Jan'y 1924,

Went into the hills southwest of camp today. Was gone all day. Saw several cliffs capped with a stratum 3 or 4 feet thick composed practically entirely of small fragments of shells cemented together with lime. No good pieces could be gotten out, but the mass was principally small species of rock oysters and pectens. In one place I found oyster shells of edible species; the shells were about the size of one palm. Most of them were broken. They were weathered out of the underlying rock. Found a large number of small bivalve shells like small clams $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long, also two or three univalves (Gastropods?). Both these were new to me. The weather remains fine.

26 Jan'y 1924

Saw a Say Flycatcher and two Plumbeous Gnatcatchers. Mr. Parker saw two Quails yesterday but could not tell if they were Valley Quail or Gambel's Quail. Birds are scarce here now. Saw a Coyote this forenoon. Have seen but two Jack-rabbits, here.

Warm Spring, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Tallecito,
San Diego Co., Cal.

April 17 1924

Drove down here this forenoon to look for gophers (Thomomys). Have taken a pretty thorough look around, but can find no gopher sign whatever. Went to the group of springs half a mile west of the warm spring and also looked on the slope of the valley north east of the warm spring. This is an ideal place for gophers, - damp ground, plenty of grass (mostly salt grass), a few tulars, some small cane, ~~at~~ arrow-wood, some bean trees, etc.

My eyesight is so poor that I can't recognize most small birds at a distance, I have recognized two small flocks of valley quail, a mourning dove, a raven, a western flycatcher (difficilis), chipping sparrows, Costa hummingbirds (♂), black-throated gray warblers, golden piliated warblers, an Oregon thrush (astulatus), western flycatcher, lutescent warblers, song sparrow, lazuli bunting, Lincoln finch.

April 18 1924

Put out 30 traps last night, with poor luck, brought one pocket rat (D. m. sinuatus), two pocket mice (P. pericillatus) and the tail of a third one, I had expected to get P. spinatus,

La Puerta Valley, San Diego Co. Cal.

April 24 1924

Yesterday I set 17 gopher traps in the wet ground along the stream on the old Mason place at the lower end of the valley. I caught but four tho a number of other traps were filled. The traps are new, and probably smell of the fresh paint, so the gophers are shy of them. I have put them in boiling water today, in hopes of stopping the paint smell.

Mr. Murritts fox terrier caught a summer warbler today, and I preserved it.

April 26 1924

Yesterday afternoon I went down to Mr. Campbell's to set gopher traps. He told me that when they began improving the place there were a few gophers there, but as soon as they got the ditches open they began drowning out the gophers and he had not seen a fresh mound for some time. I spent an hour looking around the place including the alfalfa, but saw no signs of gophers, so I quit there and drove up to what the neighborhood calls the ~~old~~ "Potato Patch" and set some traps. This is a group of small springs on a hillside with an acre or so of damp land. It is in the La Puerta Valley about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles southwest of my place and is at 2900 feet altitude. This morning I had four gophers, all females, in my traps. I set a few more traps and will take them up tomorrow morning. The soil of the "potato patch" is very dark.

May 13 1924

Laguna Mts, San Diego Co. Cal.

Came up here the 10th. Saw one gray squirrel on the way about five miles from camp. The 11th, I spent some time looking for gray squirrels and finally found one, and put a pair of box traps there. Saw also one chipmunk and put a trap for it, but unsuccessfully. This is the only chipmunk I have seen yet. Yesterday I found a pair of gray squirrels and put two traps there. This morning I saw one of the squirrels about a hundred yards from one of the traps. Had a toad in one of the box traps and have caught three blue-fronted jays in the box traps. It looks as if I wouldn't get any gray squirrels. I think I'll quit in the morning. Have seen no wild pigeons. Saw one mountain quail and two California jays. Blue-fronted jays are plentiful. Ground squirrels are not ~~only~~ nearly as plentiful as they used to be. There is considerable gopher signs both in the timber and in the open valley near the lake. Saw a fresh coyote track in the road this morning.

May 21 1924

Yesterday Mr. Glenn, Mr. Murritt and I went up on Piñon Mt. which lies 6 or 8 miles northeast of my place. It carries the largest body of piñon timber in San Diego Co. I hoped to find Piñon jays there but failed. The summit is over 5000 feet altitude. We did not go on the highest ~~but~~ peak but got where we could see Salton Lake and the Desert. Birds were very scarce. Saw one Mountain Chickadee (*Paruthus*), several Ash-throated Flycatchers and two Mountain Quail. Saw several Hummingbirds on the mountain side. Shot an Antelope Squirrel (*Ammospermophilus*) just below the summit at about 4200 alt. - higher than I have found the species in southern California before. It is a hard mountain to climb, very rocky and steep.

May 23 1924

Left the ranch yesterday at 6-15 AM. Drove to Borego Spring, 3 1/2 miles, stopped an hour at the Yaguti Hall and looked for gopher mounds but found none. About midway from there to the San Felipe Narrows we saw two sets of mounds by the roadside. Below the Narrows the road crosses a mesa to Borego Spring. On this mesa we saw several sets of gopher mounds. Here, at Borego Spring I can find no gopher mounds in the valley, where the soil is alkaline with some salt grass. At the foot of the hills and on the broken mesa land there are occasional mounds, mostly old. I put in traps at eight places, but caught but one ingrown gopher last night. Most of the runways are very small.

This region, around the valley, is much like the desert outside the Hills below Carrizo. Borego Valley is about 5 by 10 miles in extent, narrowing at the springs to about a quarter of a mile for a short distance when it opens on the main Colorado Desert. There is a spring on each side of the narrow part, but both are very small, with poor water. At the cabin at the southern spring is a Geodetic Survey post marked alt. 452 feet.

Have seen several jackrabbits and cotton-tail rabbits; ~~lots~~ tracks of mice, pocket rats and a coyote. There are probably round-tailed and antelope squirrels. Birds are scarce, have seen Texas night hawks, phainopeplas, white-throated swifts, Song and ashthroated flycatchers, a summer Warbler, a hummer,

May 24 1924

Drove to Harper Well, 26 miles, I had intended to stop at the Barrel Spring, to look for a bed of fossils, said to be found near there, but failed to find it. It is said that a blind road goes that way, but we did not see it and probably there is no travel that way now.

Saw no one between there and Borego Spring and no one is living here.

Put out 15 traps for gophers. Most of the mounds are old. Mounds and runs are confined to the damp soil along the creek and deep barrancas. Saw none on the flats. There is a little running stream in Fish Creek and a larger one, several feet wide and an inch or two deep in Salt Creek. Both were dry when Parish and I were here a dozen years ago.

May 25th 1924

Had two gophers in my traps this morning, but much of the skin was eaten off by ants, making it impossible to skin them.

May 26 1924

Made the rounds of my gopher traps four times yesterday to get the gophers before the ants destroyed them, second and third rounds nothing doing, but on the fourth round just before dark I got three. Was out before sunrise this morning and got one, which was considerably eaten but I saved it. None on the noon round but I'll go again just before dark. Will start on the back track in the morning.

No gophers on the last round. Look up the traps.

May 26 1924

Harper Well is a well drilled for oil 25 years ago. They found no oil but got a small flow of good water at 300 feet. Imperial County has graded a road past it from Westmorland to connect with San Diego Counties road via Grapevine Spring and Sontunae Canon. This place is below the old beach and is about at sea level. This is a bay of the ancient Lake Cahuilla. The old beaches are about 3 miles south, two miles north and 12 or 15 miles west-north-west. The general region is very level, with a number of arroyos and barrancas cut by floods, 10 to 15 feet deep. In the deepest there are very small streams of water, in most cases too salt to be drinkable. There are a few tufts and small patches of salt grass in the bottoms of the barrancas. Along the edges of these salt grass patches is where the gophers live. I have seen no mound elsewhere. There are scattered mesquit mounds here and there, taking the form along the arroyos. In the damp land along the barranca bottoms there is a little arrowweed. There is scarcely any other vegetation. No cactuses.

May 27 1924

Drove to the San Felipe Narrows by the direct road, which is better than that by Rosego Spring and eight miles nearer. San Felipe Creek joins Grapevine Creek (?) at the lower end of the Santonac Canon, and runs thru a valley $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 miles wide about ten miles, where the hills come near from each side, making a canon about a hundred yards wide and a quarter of a mile long, where it opens out on the Colorado Desert. Our camp is under a smoke tree at the upper end of the narrows. The nearest water is at the Yagui Well, 6 miles up the valley. The steep hills here are granitoid, much shattered by weathering. The "wash" is a pale gray sand and the soil of the valley slopes is not much better.

Along the wash are more or less small trees, mesquit, smoke trees, desert "willow" and ironwood. There are some shrubs, perennial plants, etc. On the valley slopes and hillsides are some creosote bushes, agaves, cactuses, etc, making a less barren appearance than the Desert.

May 28 1924

We came there a little before noon yesterday. After an early lunch I started up the valley to put out gopher traps, and Mr. Glenn went down ~~there~~ ^{there} ~~then~~ the narrows. He found a group of gopher burrows half a mile below camp and put out half a dozen traps. Coming back he found a freshly caught gopher in the first trap he set. On making the round before dark he got another. These were in the flat, "bottom" land it might be called. This morning at daylight no more of his traps were disturbed, so he took them up and reset them farther away on hillsides. The gophers he caught were the lightest colored we have seen yet. I set eight traps, partly in bottom land and partly on hillsides. We find difficulty in tracing the burrows, which are usually repacked with dirt for a long distance, sometimes 4 or 5 feet. The packing is ~~so~~ so similar to its surroundings that often it cannot be distinguished. At my round last night I found one gopher in a trap on a hillside. It is of the collare type, and dark for that type even. This morning two of my traps were filled, but nothing caught. It was so hot at noon that we did not go to the traps. It is the hottest day we have had on the trip and we are lying in the shade this afternoon.

Dashores place is in the eastern part of the San Felipe Valley, about a mile southeast of the San Felipe ranch gate. The soil is adobe and so hard that I had to use a pick in opening the gopher burrows. Some of the gophers were caught in the yard around the house; the others along the road north west. The family moved away a year ago. This was the only place where I found gophers abundant. The altitude is about 2500 feet.

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